

## **Periods and Phrases**

Before an architect builds a house, he makes a plan for it. The composer, also makes a plan for a composition, before he works out the details of it.

***Form, in music, is the plan upon which the composer builds his ideas.***

The study of form in music is called *Analysis*. To analyze is, simply, to take apart the main unit, or "building block" in musical form. This is called the *Period* or *Sentence*, which may be divided into *Phrases and Sections*.

The word phrase in musical form, is used to stand for a division of the music having a certain number of measures.

Phrases: A group of 4 measures is called a *Regular Phrase*.

Period: There are 2 regular Phrases in one eight measure Period.

A grouping of 2 regular Phrases forms a Regular Period.

There are also two, three, five, six, seven and eight measure phrases, which would be called Lengthened or Shortened Irregular Phrases. These phrases form an irregular Period. More on this later.

How to play phrases and periods: A slur is used to bind notes together to form a phrase. The slur is a legato sign, used because legato playing is needed to connect the tones of the phrase, and the legato stops with the last note of the phrase.

Besides playing the notes in a phrase legato, we shorten the last note a little, to separate it from the following phrase. Making clear to the listener that this is a definite musical idea. A staccato dot is sometimes found over the last note of the phrase, but this does not mean a short staccato, only that the finger or hand is to be lifted from the keyboard.

In phrasing, then, you must do the following:

1. Look for the slurs, or phrasing marks in the printed music.
2. Play notes legato which are covered by slurs.
3. At the end of a phrase, lift the hand or finger, from the keyboard.

This musical effect may be compared to taking a breath in speaking.

The following composition is an adapted version of a "Midsummer Night's Dream" by Mendelssohn, which is a perfect example of using phrases and periods. It is very important when you lift your fingers or hands at the end of a phrase and begin the next phrase, that the first beat of the next phrase is not played with a loud or accented note, this requires control over the fingers.

Analysis of "Midsummer Night's Dream:

1. This composition is written in the key of F. We will study scales in the Intermediate Lessons, but for now, this means that all of the B's in the song will be played as B flat. Look at the flat sitting by the time-signature and you will see that it is sitting on the line of B.
2. Phrases and Periods: Look at the song below, there are two phrases each 2 measures, making one phrase. A phrase is a division of music, at the end of which there is ordinarily some slight interruption to the flow of the melody. This can be a longer note, or by a rest, or by the composer's choice of chords. This song has a division where the left hand contains a rest, which interrupts the melody.  
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3. A second phrase can be a repetition of the first, maybe with minor changes, or may be a completion of the idea serving as a kind of answer. So we have a question and an answer.

Measure 1 and 2 is a phrase, measure 3 and 4 is a phrase.

Measures 1-8 is a period.

The first system of musical notation shows a treble and bass clef in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (F major). The melody in the treble clef is divided into four measures. The first two measures are labeled 'Question' and the last two are labeled 'Answer'. There are two 'Interruption' points: one at the end of measure 2 (indicated by a downward arrow) and one at the end of measure 4 (indicated by a downward arrow). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The bass clef accompaniment consists of quarter notes in measures 1-2 and rests in measures 3-4.

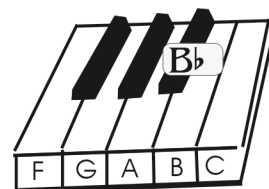
The second system of musical notation continues the melody in the treble clef over four measures. The first two measures are labeled 'Question' and the last two are labeled 'Answer'. There is one 'Interruption' point at the end of measure 2 (indicated by a downward arrow). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. The bass clef accompaniment consists of chords in measures 1-2 and quarter notes in measures 3-4.

# Beginning Compositions

## "Midsummer Night's Dream" Practice Sheet 1

### Instructions:

1. Key signature = B Flat. There is a flat sign located by the time signature and it sits on the B flat line. Every time you see a B play it as B flat unless there is a natural sign next to it indicating to play B, not B flat.
2. The phrasing has been changed. Each phrase has been divided into 2 phrases. The left hand has a rest in every set of 2 measures, therefore, the composer was making a point of a partial sentence, something like using a comma in a sentence to pause.



**KEY SIGNATURE = B FLAT**

In this study, we have a good example of music which begins with a part of a measure. Observe that in the first measure there is only 1 beat, and the last measure has only two beats. Be careful not to accent the first tone.

Beginning  
Compositions

*"Midsummer Night's Dream"*  
Practice Sheet 2

Measures 5 and 6, left hand

Measures 5 and 6, right hand

Measures 5 and 6, hands together

Measures 7 and 8, left hand

Measures 7 and 8, right hand

Measures 7 and 8, hands together