

Melody completion

Somebody has written the opening of a tune and stopped halfway. Your job is to finish it so the whole thing sounds like one melody by one person — not two halves stitched together.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

THE SHAPE OF A FOUR-BAR TUNE

Most short melodies come in pairs of phrases. The first asks, the second replies. The asking phrase usually ends somewhere unsettled — often on the dominant, the fifth degree — and hangs there. The answering phrase travels back and lands on the tonic, and that landing is what makes the tune feel finished.

The question

Bars 1–2. Sets the key, the metre and the character. Ends open — usually on the dominant, sometimes on the mediant. Never on the tonic, or there is nothing left to answer.

The answer

Bars 3–4. Begins like the question so the ear recognises it, then changes course in the last bar and closes on the tonic, usually approached by step from above or below.

SIX THINGS THE MARKER LOOKS FOR

IN ROUGHLY THIS ORDER

- **It ends on the tonic.** The single most common lost mark. Whatever else happens, the last note is the key note, on a strong beat.
- **The rhythm answers the rhythm.** Reuse the opening rhythm in bar 3 — the same pattern on different notes. A new rhythm every bar reads as four fragments, not a tune.
- **One high point.** Let the melody rise to a single highest note, usually early in the answering phrase, and come down from it. Two peaks of equal height flatten the shape.
- **Mostly steps.** Move by step and fill in leaps by turning back the other way. A leap of more than a fifth needs a reason and a recovery.
- **It stays in key.** No accidentals unless you mean them. In a minor key, raise the seventh when the melody rises to the tonic.
- **The bars add up.** Count every bar against the time signature before you hand it in, and group the notes correctly within the beat.

BEFORE YOU WRITE A NOTE

TWO MINUTES WELL SPENT

Sing the given phrase and notice where it wants to go — your ear will usually suggest the answer before your pencil does. Find the tonic on the staff and mark it lightly. Say the rhythm of bar 1 aloud, then plan to use it again in bar 3. Sketch the last note first and work backwards to it; a melody written towards a known ending almost always shapes better than one written forwards and hoping.

A worked answer, in words. Take a question in F major, 4/4. Bar 1 climbs F–G–A–B♭ in four crotchets; bar 2 holds C for the whole bar. It has gone up and stopped on the dominant, so the answer has to come down and stop on F. Bar 3 reuses those four crotchets but starts higher, on D — the high point of the tune — and falls C–B♭–A. Bar 4 answers with two minims, G then F. Same rhythm, opposite direction, tonic at the end — and in a key none of the exercises uses.

Complete these melodies

Pencil first. Sing it before you ink it.

NAME _____

DATE _____

One · C major, 4/4

Finish bars 3 and 4



Two · G major, 3/4

Finish bars 3 and 4



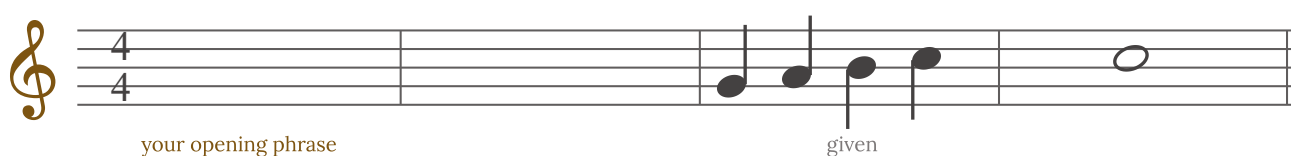
Three · D minor, 3/4, bass clef

Raise the seventh as you approach the tonic



Four · the other way round

The answer is given — write the question in bars 1 and 2



Five · both halves

Choose your own key and time signature, then write all four bars



CHECK BEFORE YOU HAND IT IN

TICK EACH ONE

- ☐ The last note is the tonic, on a strong beat.
- ☐ There is one clear high point, not two.
- ☐ Every bar adds up to the time signature.

- ☐ Bar 3 reuses the rhythm of bar 1.
- ☐ Every leap turns back the other way.
- ☐ I have sung it through from memory.