

Motif development

A motif is a handful of notes short enough to remember — three, four, maybe six. Composers do not keep inventing new ones; they take one and put it through changes. That is what holds a long piece together while still letting it go somewhere.

THE SEVEN CHANGES

LEARN THE NAMES — THEY GET ASKED FOR

Sequence	The same shape again, starting on a different note. Up or down a step is the commonest, and the easiest to hear.
Inversion	Turn the intervals upside down: every step up becomes the same step down. The rhythm is untouched.
Retrograde	The notes backwards, last to first. Hard to hear, easy to write — worth a bar, not a whole piece.
Augmentation	The same notes, each value twice as long. Broadens the music without changing the tune.
Diminution	The same notes, each value halved. Raises the energy — useful just before a climax.
Fragmentation	Keep part of the motif and repeat it, usually the last two or three notes, driving forward.
Ornamentation	The same notes with extra ones threaded between — passing notes, a turn, an added upbeat.

THE MOTIF TO WORK WITH

G MAJOR, 4/4 · FOUR CROTCHETS



Up a step, up a step, up a third — a rising shape with one small leap at the end.

TWO OF THEM WORKED OUT

IN LETTERS, BEFORE YOU WRITE ON THE STAVE

Sequence, up a step. Start on A instead of G and move every note up one letter: A-B-C-E. The intervals stay a step, a step, a third, and the key signature — not the original notes — decides the accidentals, so the C is natural.

Inversion. The motif rises a step, a step, then a third. So the inversion falls a step, a step, then a third: G-F#-E-C. Start on the same note and mirror the moves, and the F# comes from the key signature.

HOW TO USE THEM IN A REAL PIECE

THREE HABITS WORTH COPYING

- **One change at a time.** Invert the motif or augment it — not both at once. A listener can follow one transformation; two at once just sounds like a new tune.
- **Keep the rhythm when you change the pitches,** and keep the pitches when you change the rhythm. The unchanged half is what the ear holds on to.
- **Sequences come in twos or threes, then stop.** Four steps of the same sequence and the music sounds stuck.

Where it comes from. The four notes that open Beethoven's fifth symphony are a rhythm and a falling third, and almost the whole movement is built from them — sequenced, inverted, fragmented, handed round the orchestra. Four notes are already enough material.

Put the motif to work

The motif is G-A-B-D, four crotchets, G major

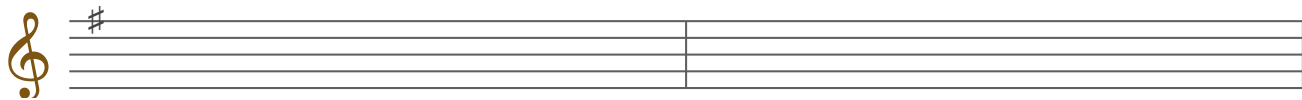
NAME _____ DATE _____

A · IN LETTER NAMES FIRST FOUR NOTES EACH, STAYING IN G MAJOR

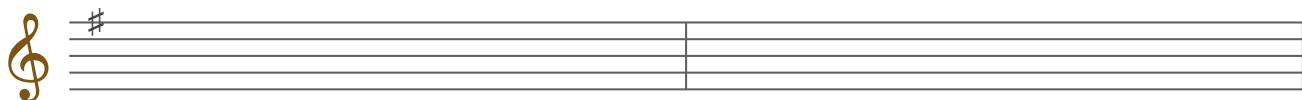
- 1 Sequence down a step _____
- 2 Sequence up a third _____
- 3 Inversion from G _____
- 4 Retrograde _____
- 5 Inversion from B _____
- 6 Retrograde, then inverted _____

B · WRITE THEM ON THE STAVE ONE BAR EACH · KEY SIGNATURE ALREADY GIVEN

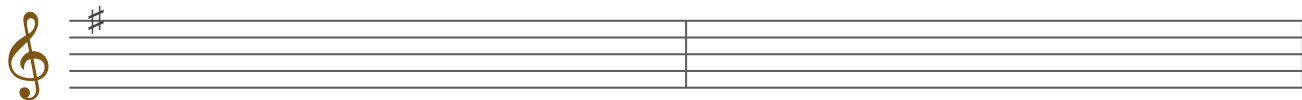
7 · Sequence, up a step Same rhythm, same intervals, one letter higher



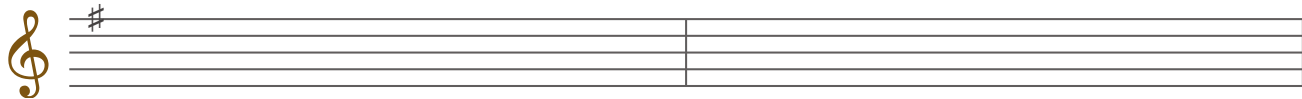
8 · Inversion Start on G and mirror every interval



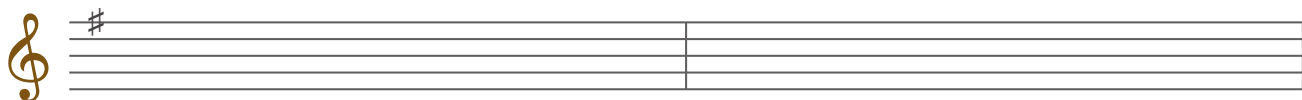
9 · Augmentation Each crotchet becomes a minim — it will need two bars



10 · Diminution, then fragmentation Halve the values in bar 1; repeat the last two notes in bar 2



11 · Ornamented Same four notes, with passing notes threaded between them



C · PLAN EIGHT BARS FROM IT NAME THE CHANGE YOU WILL USE IN EACH PAIR OF BARS

Bars 1–2 The motif as it stands	Bars 3–4 Which change?	Bars 5–6 Which change?	Bars 7–8 Close on the tonic
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Then write it out on manuscript paper. One rule: bars 7–8 must be recognisably the motif again, however far bars 3–6 travelled from it.

ANSWERS TO A SECTIONS B AND C ARE MARKED BY THE TEACHER

1 F#–G–A–C · 2 B–C–D–F# · 3 G–F#–E–C · 4 D–B–A–G · 5 B–A–G–E · 6 D–F#–G–A. In every case the accidentals come from the key signature: G major has one sharp, so F is always F# and nothing else is altered.