

The Building Blocks of Phrasing with Dr. Jensina Oliver
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The Building Blocks of Phrasing; Help your students discover common musical building blocks such as four-bar phrases, sequences, musical sentences, and more!

When a student performer understands four-bar phrases, sequences, musical sentences, and other typical compositional structures, their ability to organize and interpret improves, and subsequently they become able to express themselves more artistically. They become empowered to make logical and meaningful choices about dynamics, nuances, and communication. Come discover the building blocks of phrasing!

It is said that Chopin declared to a student:

"He who phrases incorrectly is like a man who does not understand the language he speaks."
(Nancy Toff, *The Flute Book*, Oxford University Press, 1996)

**WHAT IS
PHRASING?** _____

(There is not ONE way to phrase, but there can be more compelling and less compelling interpretations. Notice trends in the music, be aware of building blocks, then try things out! - experimentation is KEY.)

Things to consider:

1. Four Bar Phrase - Probably the most common structure in music.

Things to notice:

- Often a peak at bar 3 or downbeat of bar 4 - sense of tension/resolution due to harmonies, melodic high point or low point, etc.
- Hey Jude, Bach Prelude in C, Minuet in F (Mozart), Clock Shop

Questions for students: "Where is the tension?" " Let's experiment building at m.3 (or 4)"

2. Cadences - half (end on V), authentic (end V to I), plagal (IV to I), deceptive (go to vi), etc.

Watch the harmonic structure - here are common progressions - lean into change

- a. Ends on V - (Beethoven F major Sonatina, Pathetique II)
- b. Ends on tonic with subtlety (early on in pieces) or strength (most endings of pieces)
- c. I - I - IV - I - Burgmuller Arabesque
- d. I - I - V - I - Clementi Opus 36, No. 1: II, III

e. Deceptive progression? Pure gold! (Bring out bassline) (Attwood)

Questions for students: "What key are we in? What are our tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords?"

3. Two phrases working together make a period: First phrase ends with a weaker cadence, second phrase ends with stronger cadence - full unit working together = period structure.

Two 4-bar phrases working weaker/stronger = eight-bar period.

- Parallel period: Clementi, Opus 36 No 1 III - need robust m. 7 and resolution on m. 8
- Contrasting period: Beethoven Pathetique II
- Piano Man - Bar 4 - ends on V - bar 7-8 = V back to tonic

Questions for students: Where do you feel the most tension/resolution in this period?

Two 8-bar phrases working together weaker/stronger = 16 bar period

- Minuet in G - bar 8 - significant ending on Dominant, bar 9 begins w/similar material and ends with bar 16 on tonic.
- Handel Sarabande in D minor -

4. Sequences - Notice sequences - they are everywhere! Bach Prelude in C, Invention in F, Jazz Cat (Faber), Kuhlau, Beethoven Sonatina in F development

Questions for students - do you see any patterns? Are they moving higher or lower?

5. Targets -Often in 3s - F major invention, Handel G major, Showboat

6. Musical sentences (1+1+2 or 2+2+4) - very specific structure
Gillock Fountains, Song of Twilight, Mozart A major, Little Flower

Questions for students - Should we get bigger or smaller on 2nd statement?

7. Imitation Repetition - listen for conversations - Inventions, Repetition: Scarlatti D minor - Questions for students: Which hand is "talking?"