

**Early approaches to structure in  
composition:**

**Part 3: An introduction to ternary form,  
including pupil composition task.**

## Ternary form composition

Binary composition has been dealt with. However, ternary form is a variant of this which is worth experimenting with. Again, this is a type of structure that was in common use before the nineteenth century and, although it begins and ends in the same key, it generally has a middle section that is in a different one. This is often the relative minor/major, although any related key will be usually fine, and in some instances, when a composer is being daring, even a totally unrelated key.

Look at the example that accompanies this resource ([www.musicteachers.co.uk/resources/ternaryex.pdf](http://www.musicteachers.co.uk/resources/ternaryex.pdf)).

Written by a very young Mozart, it is a Minuet and Trio, a form which essentially evolved in the Classical period. Before, the minuet had been a standard dance that had been incorporated across Europe into instrumental suites of such Baroque composers as Handel (1685-1759), Bach (1685-1750) and Couperin (1688-1733). The need of Classical composers to extend what were probably regarded as old-fashioned forms into larger movements, however, saw the minuet often enlarged to include a trio section.

Analyse the example in a little more detail by answering the questions below:

1. What is the key of Section A?
2. Does the music of Section A modulate? If so, how and when does this happen?
3. Does Section B begin in the tonic or dominant?
4. Where does the minuet finish and the trio begin?
5. How do you know?
6. Where does the trio finish and how do you know?
7. What evidence suggests that it is a trio?
8. Have you noticed anything about the structure of the trio?
9. What happens after the trio finishes?

I have to answer these questions for you, just to make sure that you have understood what is happening, and I hope you did not cheat by reading further!

As you can see, the music is clearly in G major, where it remains for the first four bars. Then Mozart uses an e minor chord, Chord VI as a pivot to take the music towards the dominant:

Bar 5.3 to 6.1: e minor, Chord VI of G major, which also acts as Chord II of D major

Bar 6.3 to 7.2: An A major 7<sup>th</sup> chord is outlined, which is Chord V7 of D major which progresses to Chord I (Bar 7.3), then, in sequence, Chord IV, I<sub>c</sub>, V, I (this is last progression is known by the term *passive 6/4 5/3 cadence*, the 6/4 being a second inversion chord and a 5/3 being a root position. It is often used as an harmonic device at cadences.

Section B begins not as expected, in the dominant, but rather in a minor, the supertonic minor (you will remember from the previous worksheet that, after the final cadence of the first section, it is possible to begin in any key). To be honest, it doesn't seem to be in a minor, since the first chord outlines a chord of E major 7 which is Chord V7 of the new key. However, Mozart is quite clever, and to make the music more interesting still, he adds an F-natural in bar 11, which twists the harmony to Chord VII7, a diminished 7th chord on G-sharp. In either case, the resolution is going to be an a minor chord, the tonic of the new key, but this is short-lived. At the end of bar 12, a D major chord is outlined, which progresses in the first two beats of bar 14 to G major through the device mentioned earlier, a passing 6/4-5/3 cadence. A minor is outlined again (14.3-15.1), D major 7 and dominant of G major (15.2-16.2) before Chord I of G major, Chord II (17.1) and a passing 6/4-5/3 cadence in G. The modulation in the section seems to happen by stealth... the section begins with a seemingly unrelated chord, and each cadence acts as a dominant of the new key, which quickly returns the music to the tonic.

The change of key signature marks the trio, which, as the title suggests, is clearly in two- and three-part writing. The key is C major, the subdominant of G major, the first four bars of which seem to be really nothing more than a dialogue between the soprano and the bass, the inner part being nothing more than a pedal note. The semiquaver run in bar 23 outlines a chord of a minor (Chord VI of the new tonic of C major) acting as Chord V of D major, which in turn acts as Chord V of G major. Mozart is quite clever in both these instances, since the semiquavers and ensuing chords all outline first inversion chords. This is important, since it leaves the listener guessing as to which direction the music is following; a progression of such chords is generally weak sounding and we are not sure, for example, whether Mozart is resting in e minor or C major at the beginning of bar 25, or whether the cadence in bars 26-27 is really a progression in G of Chords IV-V-I (the A in the soprano part of 27, being nothing more than a decoration in the form of a suspension), or whether it is another classic passing 6/4-5/3 cadence – in this case, Chords II<sub>b</sub>, I<sub>c</sub>, V, I.

The second section of the trio, which begins on a chord of Chord V of d minor (again, creating a contrast to the previous key, as we have seen elsewhere) uses similar devices to those found at the beginning of the trio. This time, the relationship between the soprano and bass is in contrary rather than similar motion and the cadence that occurs in 30.1-2, being a weak sounding V<sub>c</sub>-I, again confusing the ear as to Mozart's intentions. The next phrase is an exact copy of the first, this time moving to a similar cadence in C major, and the remaining four bars is a copy of the closing of the trio's A section, this time in C major.

The minuet returns for the final part of this short composition. As at the beginning, it is an exact copy of the opening without the repeat marks.

To recap on what has happened in this work, we see that the Minuet and Trio is really two compositions in one, each is very different in terms of character, key and musical content, and that a sense of balance and cohesion has been created by repeating the opening material.

Mozart could have done all manner of different things here: this is nothing more than a text-book example of what could have been done. For example, the trio could contain musical elements from the minuet, perhaps a motif using the triplets that occur before the first repeat mark. Even the repeat of the minuet could have been varied with passing notes, extended phrases. Essentially, when composing in such a format, its content and techniques are essentially up to the composer.

### **Task**

You should have composed a successful binary composition when using the previous worksheet; if you have not used the first and second worksheets in this series, it is recommended that you do so before attempting the following task.

Write a short contrasting section to be appended to your previous composition. It does not have to be a trio, but try to contrast the musical material in terms of key and figuration (although you may borrow from the opening). When you are satisfied with this section, repeat the first again. Remember though, it is not important to copy the opening exactly, since you might wish to decorate the melody, extend phrases, add a longer coda, etc. How you decided to proceed is entirely up to you.