

Hierarchy of Typical Errors in Species Counterpoint

most problematic*

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least problematic*

First Species (these apply to other species too, unless specified)

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| Incorrect clefs, key signature, or accidental | Dissonant outline (TT, 7) | Repeated pattern/sequence (if relatively long) | Repeated pattern/sequence (if short) |
| Wrong starting or ending note (upper: tonic or 5th; lower: tonic) | Consecutive leaps in same direction | Simultaneous large leaps in similar direction | Simultaneous small leaps in similar direction/large in contrary direction |
| Vertical dissonance | more than two (2) consecutive leaps | Tonic or dominant triad outlined | Other triads outlined |
| Dissonant leap | Unresolved leap more than a 4th | Leap back to same note | Unprepared leap more than a P4 up |
| Leap to last note | Leading-tone climax | Leap more than a 3rd to penultimate note | Unprepared leap more than a 3rd down |
| No leading tone in minor at end | Repeated climax | Simultaneous climaxes | Excessive range (linear) |
| Wrong penultimate interval | Leap more than an octave | End climax (e.g. in upper CP starting at the perfect fifth) | Excessive range (vertical): 12th for upper cpt, occasional 13th for lower cpt |
| Unison (P1) in middle | Voice crossing | Repeated note | Ending in different register (if P1 or P8 at beginning) |
| Parallel/antiparallel perfects | | 9th outline (or more) | Too much emphasis on a particular note |
| Direct (hidden) perfects | | Unresolved leap of P4 | Motion too conjunct/disjunct |
| Altering the chosen c.f. | | Dim. 4th outline in minor | Too many (more than 3) of same type of imperfect consonance in a row |
| Not a real c.f. | | | |
| Intervals not labeled | | Voice overlapping | Unres. leap of P4, but w/a change of direction |
| Chromaticism (notes not in the key) | | Excessive motion in one direction | |

Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Species Additions/Specifics (all of the first species errors otherwise apply)

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| Parallel perfects (on adjacent beats, W to S: <i>2nd spc.</i>); (beats 3-1 or 4-1: <i>3rd spc.</i>) | Accented "parallel" perfects (downbeat to downbeat: <i>2nd spc.</i>) | Accented "direct" perfects (consec. downbeats: <i>2nd spc.</i>); (beats 3-1 or 4-1: <i>3rd spc.</i>) | In <i>minor</i> , fewer than two (2) notes between subtonic and leading tone (or submediant and raised submediant) |
| Downbeat unison (P1) in middle (<i>except if tied-to</i>) | Direct perfects (on adjacent beats: <i>2nd spc.</i>) | Incorrectly handled weak-beat unison | "Incomplete" double neighbor |
| Suspension does not resolve by step (<i>4th spc.</i>) | Hidden (direct) perfects & Accented perfects | leap back to same note if bigger than a P4 (<i>3rd spc.</i>) | Equal number of consonant and dissonant suspensions in an upper counterpoint |
| | Consecutive downbeat perfects in more than 2 consecutive bars (<i>3rd spc.</i>) | Leap after more than three (3) notes in same direction (<i>3rd spc.</i>) | |
| | Weak-beat climax (<i>3rd spc.</i>) | Incorrectly handled weak-beat unison | |
| | Suspension resolves stepwise, but upwards (<i>4th spc.</i>) | Dissonant outline if weak-> weak, or involving leading tone in penultimate bar (<i>2nd-5th spc.</i>) | |
| | Breaking 4th species in consec. bars (except beginning/end) | More consonant than dissonant suspensions in an upper cpt. | |
| | | 7-8 or 2-1 suspension | |
| | | Tie (<i>2nd and 3rd spc.</i>) | |
| | | Rhythm errors (<i>5th spc.</i>) | |

*) This particular ordering of "errors" into relative degrees of undesirability is to some extent subjective on the instructor's part. By the same token, specific occurrences may seem more or less problematic depending upon the particular context. Certain melodic "imperfections" are warranted in order to avoid other problems (see the separate page on "melodic imperfections").