

MUS 233 Sonata Form

Sonata Form = *Sonata Allegro* form = *First-Movement* Form

Formal design mainly found in first movements of instrumental Sonatas, Trios, String Quartets, Symphonies, Concertos, and/or one-movement Overtures in the Classical period.

The outline of the form is:

- **Exposition** section: thematic ideas are set forth in contrasting, closely-related keys.
- **Development** section: characterized by one or more of the following:
 - modulation to more remote key(s)
 - comparative instability of tonal center(s)
 - fragmentation, sequence, imitation of thematic elements from exposition
- **Recapitulation** section: restatement of exposition materials—usually in the original order, possibly with different transitions subsections, and with greater emphasis on the tonic key.
- Occasional formal expansion:
 - **introduction** section: usually slower, anticipating a fast (*Allegro*) movement
 - **coda**: follows the recapitulation

Dramatic structure of the Sonata form:

Section:	Introduction	Exposition	Development	Recapitulation	Coda
Thematic element:	Free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal theme (PT) • Transition • Secondary theme (ST) • Possible transition • Closing theme (CT) aka Third theme (TT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic manipulation of elements from the exposition • New material is possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PT • ST • CT/TT <p>(and their respective transitions)</p>	Free, or recollection of earlier theme(s)
Key(s):	Tonic or parallel minor, Dominant emphasis at close (i.e. a half cadence)	PT: Tonic ST: Dominant/related key, or other CT: Usually same as ST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modulations • Tonal instability • Dominant pedal/emphasis at section's end 	PT: Tonic ST: Tonic TT: Tonic (momentary deviations are possible)	Tonic (momentary deviations are possible)
Drama:	Exploration, uncertainty	From stability to "conflict"	conflict, instability	Resolution, reconciliation, stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability confirmed • Unfinished business reconciled

Sonata Form Details

Introduction: (optional):

- Most often before the first movement (a fast first movement). Final movements occasionally have an introduction.
- Material from introduction seldom reappears in the main body of the movement.
- The key is almost always the *tonic*. If the movement is in a major key, the intro. may be in the parallel minor. The introduction may end in the dominant (a half cadence), but rarely on an authentic cadence.
- Slow movements rarely have an introduction.

Exposition

- Largely *binary*, regardless of inner subdivisions
- **Opening Section** (or principal theme, first theme, principal group, theme A): tonic in orientation, the rest is not. It may be a phrase group or several groups. It is seldom periodic in form, closes on a cadence (half or authentic) or dissolves into a transition.
- Usually repeated, sometimes with first and second endings.
- **Transition**: a modulating/connective passage designed to prepare the arrival of a new key and/or thematic material. It may contain thematic or *neutral* material (arpeggios, scales). The texture is contrasting. Closes on the dominant key or dissolves without a transition.
- **Second Theme** (or second group, section, Theme B): in a *contrasting key*. Usually the thematic material is also contrasting. Usually more *lyrical* than the first theme. Likely to show periodic structure. Carefully prepared terminal cadence, except when followed by a closing theme.
- **Closing Theme** (or closing group, section): if present, it is usually in the same contrasting key as the *second theme*. Material that is not related to the principal theme may appear, but if the thematic material here is strikingly new and fairly extended (not neutral), the term *third theme* (TT) may be used, in which case a closing section or *codetta* follows. Ends on an authentic cadence.
- **Codetta** (optional): a short extension that brings the entire exposition to a satisfactory close. Different from the *coda*, which ends the whole movement. Usually not more than an expression of the cadential formula (I – vi – IV – 6/4 – V – I). It may dissolve into a modulating transition to the repeated exposition and/or the development section.

Development:

- Usually, but not necessarily, shorter than the exposition.
- Composed of *several subdivisions*, the first of which is short, often an outgrowth of the last part of the codetta. Each subdivision is usually identified with one or more themes and/or techniques, and should be distinguished with other neighboring sections.
- Material derives from PT (usually), or any of the other subsections of the exposition...which is to say that the development takes the opportunity to rework (develop) the elements of the exposition.
- But there might be new material as well.
- Techniques employed
 - Modulation to more remote key(s), fragmentation, sequence, imitation of elements from the exposition
 - Assist in achieving *increased dramatic intensity* and a sense of climax
- The closing portion of the development, the *retransition*, may be marked by an extended *dominant pedal point*.
- Anticipatory fragments of the PT may be heard as a “false recapitulation”.

Recapitulation:

- A *modified restatement* of the exposition.
- Emphasis on tonic harmony (in contrast to the tonal dichotomy of tonic/dominant in the exposition).
- Themes return *in the original order*, but sometimes elements are omitted, shortened, extended, transplanted or otherwise varied.
- Previously separated themes or motives may now appear simultaneously.
- An unexpected key may be used for variety (but this would not outweigh the total section’s emphasis on tonic harmony).
- The *transition* is the portion most likely to be altered, since PT and ST will be in the tonic key the transition will NOT need to function as a modulatory device.
- If there is a *third theme* (TT), the ST *may not be in the tonic key* after all, since that would be reserved for the TT.
- The *closing theme* (or TT) and *codetta* will often be used in the recapitulation. Their substance will very much resemble the corresponding section in the exposition.

Coda:

- Usually begins at the point where parallelism between exposition and recapitulation ends.
- Generally short, probably the shortest of all sections.
- Provides tonal (in the tonic) stability.
- Phrases and phrase groups tend to be progressively shorter.
- Tonic cadences recur with increased frequency
- Increased intensity often achieved by a change to a faster tempo, especially if the movement began with a *slow* introduction.
- A return of material from the introduction is unusual.