

Dr. Thornock
Revising a Melody

Melodic writing (the soaring, lyrical type) can be difficult. While coming up with a string of pitches is easy, getting them all to cooperate with each other, to create the desired type of motion, can be very tedious, requiring multiple revisions.

The first step in revising a melody is to have a melody to work with. The second step is to know what *affekt* you want to achieve with the melody. *Refinement of technique will lead to an increased ability of expression.*

When revising a melody, consider the following problems.

Problem 1: It's just not going anywhere. You need a goal.

1. Determine a basic contour. Try to mold your melody to that contour.
2. Determine a goal pitch. Keep that pitch "special" by not over-utilizing it until you arrive at the goal.
3. Emphasize your goal arrival through
 - a. Duration (usually long)
 - b. Dynamic (loud or soft)
 - c. Color
 - d. Texture (thicker)
 - e. Harmonic rhythm (speeding up or slowing down)
 - f. Change in harmony at moment of arrival
4. This general problem could be related to the overall pacing of the melody. Try shorter or longer phrases, or a greater variety of phrase lengths.

Problem 2: The melody moves too fast.

1. Lengthen some of the notes. What happens when one of them is made very very long?
2. Repeat a sequence of two or three pitches. Cycle through the pitches in order, or change the order, as needed for melodic interest.
3. Lengthen existing rests.
4. Add more rests. Try different lengths of rests. You may need to then reconsider the duration of surrounding pitches.
5. Slow down the supporting harmony underneath. What happens with longer periods of harmonic stasis?
 - * This may be a problem with goal orientation (velocity without direction). See Problem 1.

Problem 3: The melody moves too slowly.

1. Shorten some notes. What if you have some very short notes?
2. Add ornamental notes to long ones without changing the overall duration.

3. If using a limited selection of pitches, try chromatic alterations to get the harmonic flow of the melody moving.
 4. Shorten or eliminate rests.
 5. Speed up the supporting harmony underneath.
 6. Maybe more interest in surrounding texture would help.
- * This may be a problem with goal orientation (not moving toward goal pitches fast enough). See Problem 1.

Problem 4: The motion stagnates on one note. This is different from above if the overall pacing is balanced but one pitch happens to create a “stall”.

1. Add ornamental notes.
 - a. One or two neighbor tones.
 - b. An entire “mini-phrase” that begins and ends on the given pitch.
2. Add a simple counter-melody somewhere else (even just two or three pitches).
3. Create more texture or harmonic variety during the given pitch.

Problem 5: The contour is too jagged; too many ups and downs.

1. Determine a goal pitch. See Problem 1.
 2. Transpose pitches up or down an octave.
 3. Insert pitches between adjacent notes, creating “ladders” in effect.
 4. Transpose by other intervals.
 5. Slow the melody down. Sometimes too-fast rhythms will cause this problem.
- See Problem 2.

Problem 6: The contour is too smooth or flat.

1. Transpose one or two pitches by octave.
2. Insert pitches between adjacent notes to create skips or register changes.
3. Speed the melody up. See Problem 3.

Problem 7: The *rhythm* is boring or predictable.

1. Think in extremes. Choose one note; make it extremely long or extremely short. Revise the surrounding music accordingly before making a final decision.
2. You might have too many articulated downbeats.
 - a. Ties over the barline.
 - b. Changing meters.
3. You might have too many articulated beats in general.
 - a. Try dotted rhythms.
 - b. Try triplets, quintuplets, etc.