

Quick-and-dirty summary of strict  
note-against-note counterpoint in TWO voices

HORIZONTAL successions:

Within each part, the voice-leading ought to proceed: *mostly* by step (or tie), with *some* skips of a third, and only a *few* leaps of a fourth, fifth, or sixth.

The bass may incorporate more leaps than the soprano, but you must take care to maintain coherence (generally by stepwise relations between temporally *non*-adjacent notes).

Leaps are best handled according to a zig-zag model.

An upward leap ought to be preceded AND followed by downward steps; conversely, a downward leap ought to be preceded AND followed by upward steps. The larger the leap, the more important it is to adhere to this model.

VERTICAL successions:

When writing for only two voices, with both voices sharing identical rhythms, the **ONLY** vertical intervals permitted are consonances. There ought to be more imperfect consonances than perfect ones. The **APPROACH** to each kind of consonance is constrained according to the relative motion of the two voices:

	PERFECT consonance (P5, P8, P12, etc.)	IMPERFECT consonance (3, 6, 10, 12, etc.)
Oblique	good	good
Contrary both move by step	good	good
one by step, one by leap	acceptable if the leap is in the bass	good*
both move by leap	FORBIDDEN	FORBIDDEN
Similar one by step, one by leap	FORBIDDEN (in two-part writing)	good*
both move by leap	FORBIDDEN	FORBIDDEN
Parallel both move by step	FORBIDDEN	good
both move by leap	FORBIDDEN	FORBIDDEN

\*The smaller the leap, the better.

Q: What guidelines or rules of thumb can you abstract from the table above?