

CONTRASTING ENERGIES IN PHRASING

In the previous lesson, we studied the structure of phrasing and its units. In this lesson, the focus shifts to sensing and experiencing that phrasing.

There are two types of energy to be felt in phrasing:

- a fluid, lighter energy, reaching forward from a distance (“not here, moving ahead”)
- a more static, heavier energy, felt closer and more immediate (“right here”)

As mentioned earlier, one of the main challenges for pianists is learning how to play the less important parts—“not here, not here.”

When this skill is not developed, there is a tendency to give too much energy to too many elements, often seeking even greater intensity. This can lead to the accumulation of unnecessary tension in both mind and body.

Expressive and important moments can only emerge clearly when contrasted with lighter, less prominent material.

For this reason, phrasing practice may involve exploring a new approach—learning how to play with a lighter, less important and less emphasised energy.

Motif

c-d-c-e-c-f-c-f#

not here, not here right here, right here

Phrase

c-d-c-e-c-f-c-f#-c-g-c-a-c-b-c-c

not here, not here right here, right here

Sentence

c-d-c-e-c-f-c-f#-c-g-c-a-c-b-c-c | c-b-c-a-c-g-c-f#-c-f-c-e-c-d-c-c |

right here, right here not here, not here

It is important to recognise that the clear contrast between these two energies is primarily a tool for practice. As this becomes more familiar, phrasing begins to flow more seamlessly, naturally gravitating toward points of prominence—such as the main intervals within motifs, the primary motif within phrases, or the central phrase within a sentence.

While the contrast becomes less pronounced in performance, it remains present in a subtle way, reflected in inner sensation and vocal awareness.

Speech Exercise

It can be helpful to begin with a simple speech exercise. Say out loud two short phrases that represent the contrasting energies you will later express in singing and playing.

The first is “not here, not here”, reflecting the less prominent parts of phrasing—such as less prominent intervals within a motif, motifs within a phrase, or phrases within a sentence.

The second is “right here, right here”, reflecting the more prominent points—such as the main interval within a motif, the main motif within a phrase, or the central phrase within a sentence.

Say these phrases out loud, and connect to the energy behind them. The clearer the contrast you establish between these two energies, the more expressive and defined your phrasing will become in playing.

SINGING EXERCISES

Remember that singing motifs, phrases, and sentences with musical speech in your intonation helps you feel and convey phrasing more expressively.

If, however, musical speech begins to limit your ability to express clear contrasts in phrasing, set it aside temporarily. Focus instead on intonation alone, allowing you to fully experience the energetic flow of crescendo and diminuendo, and to maximise their contrast and effect.

Therefore, your practice routine may be divided into two parts: first, working without musical speech, and then reintroducing it in the second stage.



<i>Motifs</i>	
<i>Sing Out Loud / Internally</i>	– Sing the first two intervals more quickly, with a fluid, forward-moving sense of energy, without using audible glissando – Sing the last two intervals more slowly, with a more grounded, static, present energy, with more weight, glissando and resistance – There should be no added pressure or intensity in the notes themselves.
<i>Phrases</i>	
<i>Sing Out Loud / Internally</i>	– Sing the less prominent motif more quickly, with a fluid, forward-moving sense of energy, without using audible glissando – Sing the more prominent motif more slowly, with a more grounded and present energy, adding more weight, glissando, and resistance • Allow yourself to sing freely, without concern for precise pitch • Sense the energy between the notes while singing with intonation • Sing the phrase continuously, without pausing to breathe, to experience the phrase as a single unit • Phrasing creates a sense of rhyme; when singing, introduce small commas between motifs • Identify the primary interval—the key interval within the main motif
<i>Sentence</i>	
<i>Sing Out Loud / Internally</i>	– Sing the less prominent phrase more quickly, with a fluid, forward-moving sense of energy, without using audible glissando – Sing the more prominent phrase more slowly, with a more grounded and present energy, adding more weight, glissando, and resistance • Allow yourself to sing freely, without concern for precise pitch • Sense the energy between the notes while singing with intonation • Sing the sentence continuously, without pausing to breathe, to experience the sentence as a single unit • Phrasing creates a sense of rhyme; when singing, introduce small commas between phrases • Identify the primary interval—the key interval within the main motif of the main phrase

Motifs

rit. *rit.*
 c-d-c-e-c-f-c-f# breathe c-g-c-a-c-b-c-c breathe

rit. *rit.*
 c-b-c-a-c-g-c-f# breathe c-f-c-e-c-d-c-c breathe

Phrases

rit.
 c-d-c-e-c-f-c-f#-c-g-c-a-c-b-c-c breathe

rit. accel.
 c-b-c-a-c-g-c-f#-c-f-c-e-c-d-c-c breathe

Sentence

rit. accel.
 c-d-c-e-c-f-c-f#-c-g-c-a-c-b-c-c c-b-c-a-c-g-c-f#-c-f-c-e-c-d-c-c breathe

PLAYING EXERCISES

Adjusting Motion for Phrasing

When a slight slowing is needed—such as in sevenths and octaves—use elbow motion together with a double swing in the wrist. When no slowing is required, combine elbow motion with a more flattened 2D wrist motion.

As you slow down toward the main point of the phrasing, allow the amplitude of the hand motion to increase, while keeping the fingertips in contact with the surface of the keys. This helps maintain freedom in the hand; otherwise, a sense of restriction in your hand may be reflected in the tension of your inner singing.

Integrating Musical Speech into Phrasing

If it is difficult to feel musical speech in every interval, simplify the approach. Focus on applying musical speech *only to the main interval* within each motif, rather than to every interval. Intonate this main interval clearly, and sense how the preceding intervals lead toward it.

As your skills develop, you may gradually extend musical speech to a wider range of intervals.

From Exaggeration to Balance in Phrasing

When practicing at the level of motifs, it is natural to exaggerate changes in dynamics and tempo, and this can be helpful. As motifs are combined into phrases—and later phrases into sentences—these dramatic shifts in dynamics and tempo will gradually become more balanced.

For instance, you'll notice that less prominent motifs will naturally have less pronounced crescendos and be played with a smoother tempo. Similarly, when playing the entire sentence, the dynamics and tempo of the less prominent phrase will also become more refined.

Practice with musical speech

Motifs, Phrases, Sentence

Playing

*allow changes in
dynamics and tempo*

1. Imagine the notes in sound texture, with sound movement and glissando.
2. Sing internally with dynamics and tempo changes.

- Play phrasing with sound imagination, allowing crescendo or diminuendo in dynamics, slowing down as you approach the main part of the phrasing while increasing amplitude of 3D wrist motion.
- “Not here, not here” parts in phrasing are played more softly and with a slightly faster tempo; “right here” parts are played louder and more slowly—using more arm-weight and a larger amplitude of hand motion, reaching ‘double swings’ in the most prominent intervals of phrasing.



Motifs

<i>rit.</i> 	<i>rit.</i>
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<i>rit.</i> 	<i>rit.</i>
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Phrases

rit.

rit. accel.

Sentence

rit. accel.

You may find the interval C-F # unstable when played with the 4th finger.
 In that case, you may use the 3rd finger on F # instead.

OPEN LESSONS

