

MAKING PHRASES

Now that you've been *listening* for phrases, it's time to write your own. In this lesson we'll walk through the general concepts involved in writing good phrases.

Steps and Skips

Phrases are typically made with a combination of steps and skips, sometimes called walks and jumps, and they always take place in a key.

Steps
Stepwise motion (or walking) is just moving from one note in the scale to the very next note of the scale, moving up or down

T					0	1
A		0	2	3	0	2
B	3					

Skips
Moving in skips (or jumps) is when you play any note *except* the note next door. Arpeggios are a great example of jumping, but jumps or skips can span more than an octave in some songs.

T		0			0		2		1
A		2			0	3			
B	3								

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

T	1								
A			2		0	2			
B									

Hey good look- 'in'

Hey, Good Lookin' A Phrase

Here is an example of a phrase using skips and steps. This phrase starts with a C, then jumps down to A, then steps down to G, then steps back up to A.

Notice the pause between the first note and the three notes that follow. Spacing each note evenly tends to sound predictable, but playing with longer and shorter notes like this tends to sound more interesting.

Two of Us A, B, and D Phrase

This tune uses WAY more steps than skips. Generally speaking, tunes tend to have more steps than skips, but there are always exceptions.

The diagram shows the melody for 'Two of Us' across three phrases: A, B, and D. The staff is labeled with notes C, B, A, G, F#, E, D. The A phrase consists of six notes: D, E, F#, G, A, B. The B phrase consists of five notes: A, G, F#, E, D. The D phrase consists of three notes: C, B, A. Above the staff, arrows indicate 'step' (pink) and 'skip' (green) movements. Below the staff, a sequence of numbers (1, +, 2, +, 1, +, 2, +, 1, +, 2, +, 1, +, 2, +, 1, +, 2, +, 1, +, 2, +, 1, +, 2, +, 1, +, 2, +) indicates the number of steps or skips between notes. Below the staff is a TAB section with three rows labeled T, A, and B, and lyrics: you and me sun-day dri-ving not a-rriv-ing on our way back home.

Ain't No Sunshine

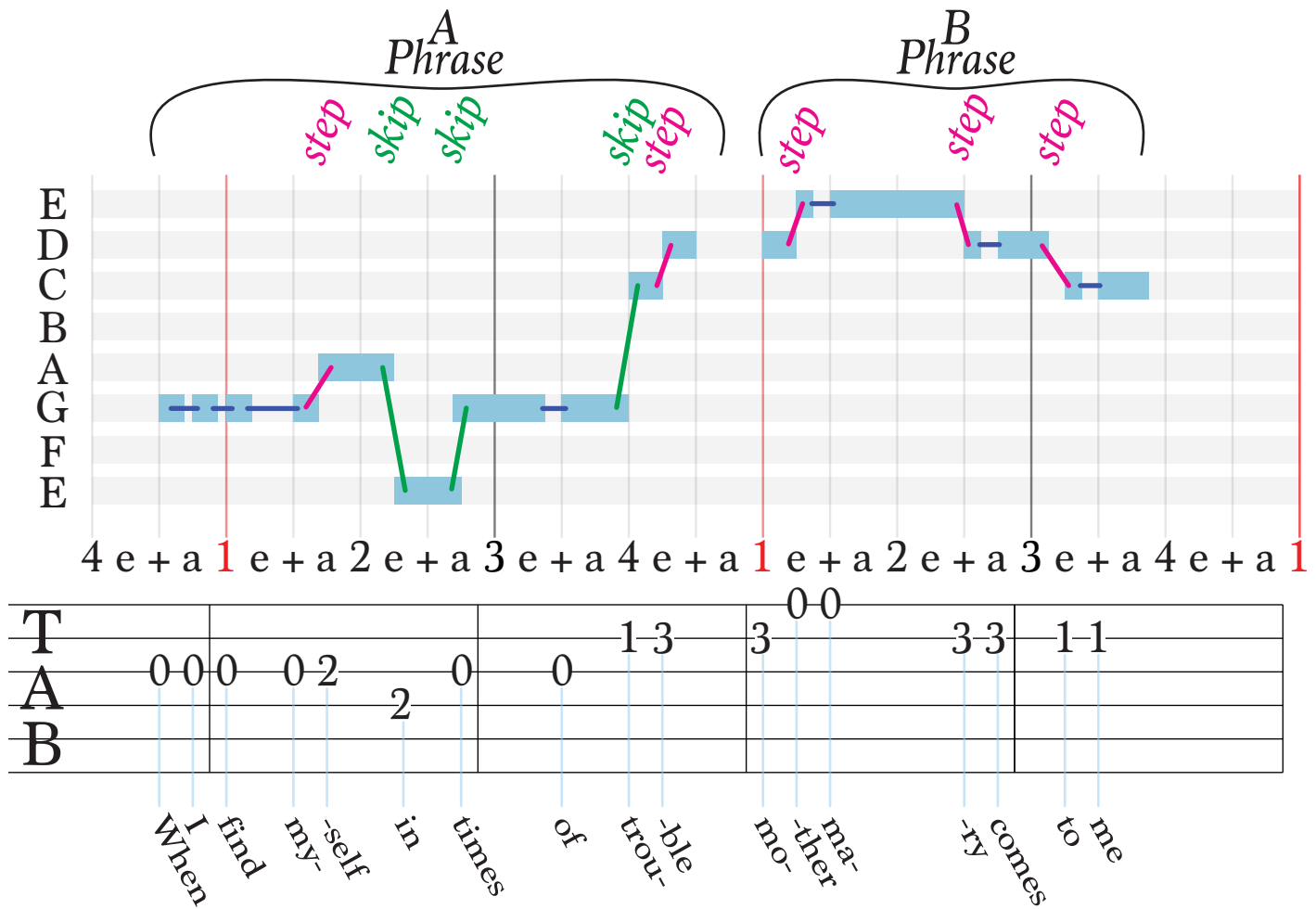
A Phrase

This phrase uses more steps than skips, too.

The diagram shows the A phrase melody for 'Ain't No Sunshine'. The staff is labeled with notes C, B, A, G, F, E. The melody consists of notes: E, F, G, A, B, A, G, F, E, D. Above the staff, arrows indicate 'skip' (green) and 'step' (pink) movements. Below the staff, a sequence of numbers (1, e, +, a, 2, e, +, a, 3, e, +, a, 4, e, +, a, 1, e, +, a, 2, e, +, a, 3, e, +, a, 4, e, +, a) indicates the number of steps or skips between notes. Below the staff is a TAB section with three rows labeled T, A, and B, and lyrics: Ain't no sun-shine when she's gone.

Let it Be - The Beatles - A and B phrase

Here is another example of phrases that use skips and steps. In this case, the A phrase uses more skips than steps, and the B phrase is only steps.



Another important consideration is how many times the a note is repeated in a tune. For example, in these two phrases from Let it Be, there are 7 situations where the same note is repeated (shown in blue). This is also an important consideration when writing phrases: it is OK to repeat notes!

If you look at all the phrases we've analyzed so far in these lessons, they all have something in common. None of them span more than one octave. This is a good general rule of melody writing because most people are comfortable singing within about an octave. There are always exceptions, but a good rule of thumb is to at least write *phrases* that stay within an octave, like the phrases above in Let it Be.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow - Harold Arlen & Yip Harburg - A and B phrase

This famous tune is known for jumping a full octave immediately.

A Phrase **B Phrase**

D
C#
B
A
G
F#
E
D

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

T		3	2	0	2	3	0	
A	0		2				0	2
B								

Some- -where o- -ver the rain- -bow way up high

Notice how the A phrase doesn't continue upward after that big octave jump - it moves back down, then back up to the highest point. This is another good rule of thumb: the bigger the jump, the more appropriate it is to move back down rather than continue upward.

Notice how the B phrase makes a smaller jump of a major 6th, as if to say "that was a big jump, here is a smaller one."

As you move on to the next page, keep in mind that this stuff takes time to make sense, and even more time to become intuitive. As we keep building on the skills and "rules" we're compiling in this series, your personal style will begin to develop and melody making will be more fun. This lesson on phrases is an important stepping stone toward writing full melodies.

4

C
B
A
G
F
E
D
C

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

T
A
B

5

C
B
A
G
F
E
D
C

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

T
A
B

6

C
B
A
G
F
E
D
C

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

T
A
B

7

C
B
A
G
F
E
D
C

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

T
A
B

8

C
B
A
G
F
E
D
C

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

T
A
B

9

C
B
A
G
F
E
D
C

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

T
A
B