Phrase and period

A **phrase** is a musical sentence, often four bars long. Two phrases that belong together — a **question** and its **answer** — make a **period**, the most common eight-bar shape in music.

EVERY PHRASE ENDS WITH A CADENCE
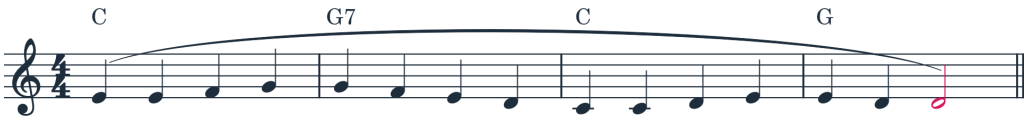
You can hear where a phrase stops: the melody settles on a longer note and the chords make a **cadence** (Handout 72). How it stops decides what comes next. A phrase that stops on the **V chord** sounds open, like a comma. A phrase that goes **V → I** sounds closed, like a period at the end of a sentence.

- **Half cadence** · ends on V · a comma
- **Authentic cadence** · V → I · a period

ANTECEDENT + CONSEQUENT = A PERIOD · ODE TO JOY
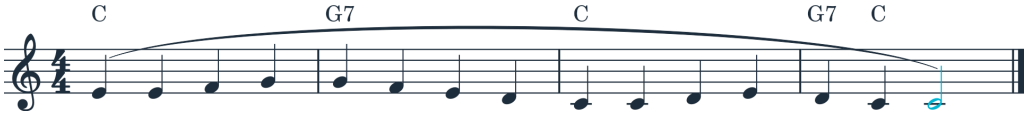
Antecedent · bars 1–4

The question. It stops on **D** over the **G** chord: a **half cadence**.



Consequent · bars 5–8

The answer. Same start, then G7 → C and home on **C**: an **authentic cadence**.



Beethoven, Symphony No. 9 (1824) · C position, rhythm and chords simplified · the curve = one phrase.

PARALLEL OR CONTRASTING?

Parallel period

a | a′

The answer **starts like the question** and changes only its ending. Ode to Joy is one: bars 5–7 copy bars 1–3.
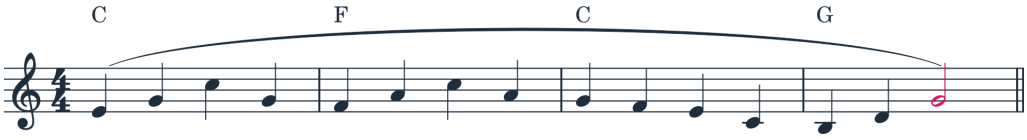
Contrasting period

a | b

The answer brings **new material** but still closes the sentence with an authentic cadence — like the example below.

Antecedent

Quarter notes outlining C–F–C–G. It stops on **G** over the **G** chord: half cadence.



Consequent

New idea: long notes stepping down. It ends G7 → C on **C**: authentic cadence.



An original eight bars in Classical style.

Try it Play the Ode's antecedent and **stop**: it hangs in the air. Now play the original antecedent and make up your own answer — first a **parallel** one (start the same, end on C), then a **contrasting** one (something new, still ending G7 → C). Shape each phrase as in **Handout 221**, breathe between them, and pick your own chords with Handout 358. Then hear question-and-answer phrases in Chopin's Prelude in A (Handout 380). Practice: Exercises 85 and 53.

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