Phrasing

Music speaks in **sentences**. A long curved line over several measures — the **phrase mark** — shows where one musical sentence starts and where it ends.

THE PHRASE MARK

A phrase mark looks like a slur, only longer, and it asks for the same thing: play every note under it **smoothly connected**, like one breath. Its end is the end of the sentence. There the hand **lifts** for a moment — a singer would breathe — and the next phrase starts fresh. Sometimes the composer prints a small comma (’), the **breath mark**, to make the lift unmistakable.

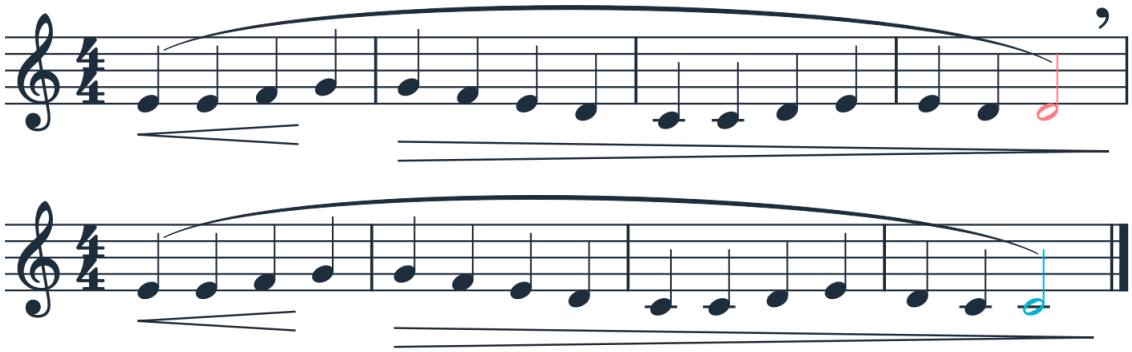
QUESTION AND ANSWER · ODE TO JOY

Phrase 1 · question

Ends on D, away from home. It sounds unfinished — you wait for more.

Phrase 2 · answer

Starts the same way, then ends **home on C**. Now the sentence is complete.



Beethoven, Symphony No. 9 (1824) · C position, rhythm simplified · hairpins under the staff = the shape of the phrase.

SHAPE EVERY PHRASE

Rise

Grow a little toward the **high point** — usually the highest or longest note. In the Ode it is the **G** in bars 1–2.

Taper

After the high point, **ease off**. Let the last note land softly, like the end of a spoken sentence — never punch it.

Breathe

At the end of the curve, **lift the wrist** and let the sound stop for a moment. Then begin the next phrase, fresh.

Try it First **sing** phrase 1 on “la” in one breath, breathe at the comma, then sing phrase 2. Now play it the same way. Stop after phrase 1: does it feel unfinished? Finally, find the phrase marks in a piece you are learning and mark each high point with a small ∧. Smaller curves: **Handout 62** (two-note slurs) and **Handout 220** (ties vs slurs). Practice: Exercise 85.

LISTEN
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