

Theme and variations

In this form, composers begin with one theme, or melodic idea, and then write a series of pieces which all modify the original theme in different ways. They can vary the melody by adding or subtracting notes. They can change the key, the harmony or the rhythms, or repeat the melody with different music around it. Often composers used this form to show off their skill at improvising to entertain people at a party or during a concert. They would be given a theme, and they would improvise as many variations as they could right then and there. These improvisations were often written down later and published. One famous example of theme and variations form is the series of variations that Mozart improvised on the French folk tune called "Ah, vous dirai-je Maman" which we know as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

Minuet and trio

In the Baroque period, composers developed a kind of composition called a suite, which was made up of many different types of dance music. Classical composers took one particular type of dance music, the minuet, and incorporated it into many different kinds of compositions. The minuet was a stately dance in 3/4 time, and the minuet and trio form was composed of two separate minuets, one used for the first and last sections, and the other for the middle section. The first minuet, **A**, was followed by a second, **B**. Then **A** was repeated, to give an **A-B-A** structure to the piece. The **B** section was always called a trio because it was originally played by three instruments. It generally presents a contrast to the **A** sections, using a different key, different instruments or different rhythms. Symphonies in the Classical period often had a minuet as the third movement.

Rondo

A rondo is a form in which the main musical idea keeps coming back. Composers during the Classical era usually introduced the first theme **A**, then moved to a second **B**, went back to the first **A** before adding a third theme **C**. They would repeat theme **A** after every new theme, and end with it as well. You can think of the rondo form then as **A-B-A-C-A-D-A**. The rondo is often used as the last movement of a symphony or other large work. One of the most famous rondos is the *Turkish Rondo* from Mozart's Piano Sonata in A Major.

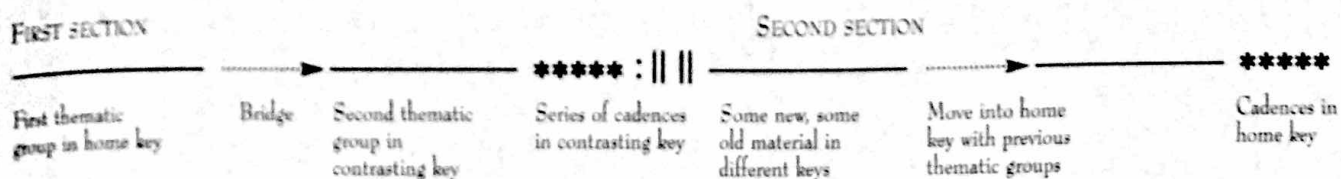
First movement form

First-movement form, also known as sonata form, or sonata-allegro form, was developed in the Classical period and became the form most frequently used by composers of the era. The most important thing about this form is the conflict between two keys, and it is this conflict and its resolution that provide the dramatic effect. First-movement form can be divided into two sections. In the first, the music is established in one key, called the home key, and then moves to a contrasting key. In the second section, the composer plays around with those two keys, introducing other keys as well, and then brings us back to the home key. The drama can be heightened by using different **thematic groups** in the home key and in the contrasting key. Dramatic contrast can also be added using different registers, different dynamic levels and different rhythmic structures.

First-movement form was a development of the old two-section structure of the Baroque sonata, and it became the basis for much of the music written in the Classical period, primarily used as the first movement of symphonies, concertos and sonatas. During the Romantic period, first-movement form continued to be popular and evolved into a three-part structure, made up of exposition, development and recapitulation, but current research suggests that the two-section analysis is a more accurate representation of what was really taking place in the Classical period.

A **thematic group** is made up of several motifs, or short melodies, in the same key which function together in the same section of a form.

First movement form



The above diagram may help to explain this very important concept. The first section begins with the first thematic group in the home key. Then there is a transition passage, or bridge, presenting new thematic material, often reused later on, which moves the music into the contrasting key. The composer then introduces the second thematic group in the contrasting key, which may include some old thematic material as well as some new, and emphasizes the idea of that contrasting key with a series of cadences.

The second section serves to work out the conflict established in the first section between the two keys. First, new and old thematic material in various keys is presented. Then the music moves back into the home key. While composers sometimes bring back the first thematic group at this point, they always bring back the second thematic group. This time, however, it is in the home key, which gives the music a sense that the conflict has been resolved. Then another series of cadences in the home key follow, to underscore that feeling of resolution.

None of this was carved in stone, of course, and Classical composers worked out the structure differently with each piece they wrote.

The symphony

The origins of the symphony lie in the overtures, or introductory orchestral music, written for Italian opera during the Baroque period. These *sinfonia*, as they were called in Italian, really had nothing that connected them with the operas that followed them, and they soon began to be played by themselves, in concerts. The idea caught on, and composers began writing symphonies that were completely independent of operas. In the hands of composers like Haydn and Mozart, the symphony became the crowning glory of the Classical period.

Originally a work in three sections, fast-slow-fast, the symphony became a four-movement work. The first movement was always an Allegro, a fast tempo, written in the first-movement form we discussed earlier. The second movement was usually a slow and lyrical three-part form, the third often a minuet and trio in a moderate tempo, and the fourth a faster and lighter movement, often in first-movement or rondo form.

THE SYMPHONY

Movement	Form	Tempo
First movement	1 st movement form	Allegro (fast)
Second movement	Three-part form (ABA)	Slow
Third movement	Minuet and trio	Moderate
Fourth movement	1 st movement or rondo form	Fast