

How to Vary a Melody



■ A great little tune has been stuck in your head for weeks, and finally you get the chance to write it down and see where it leads. The only problem is, it's not going anywhere. You're stuck, but it would be such a shame to see this melody go to waste.

Here are five tried and true methods that have been used since the Baroque era to spin out material from just a few notes. Their names may sound daunting, but really, they're all quite simple—and they may just do the trick to beat your writer's block!

5 TRICKS TO BEAT WRITER'S BLOCK



1) Inversion

Turn the melody upside-down. For example, if the original melody went up by an interval of a third and then down a second, the inversion will go *down* a third and then *up* a second. There are two types of inversions. Literal inversions are strict about whether the intervals are minor or major. This usually results in a lot of accidentals (notes that aren't in the key signature) and can make for some pretty funky sounding stuff—and maybe that's exactly what you're looking for! But, it is much more common to use diatonic inversions, where you stick to the key signature. With diatonic inversions, for example, you only care that the interval is a sixth, not whether it's a minor sixth or major sixth.

2) Retrograde

Flip the melody backwards. This really is as easy as it sounds: Just reverse the order of your notes. If the original tune was A, C, B, G, the retrograde is G, B, C, A.

3) Retrograde Inversion

Reverse the order of your notes and then flip the intervals upside-down to create a virtually unrecognizable version of your original melody. The inversion may be either literal or diatonic.

4) Augmentation

Stretch out the melody rhythmically. Most often, note values are doubled. It is important to keep in mind that this must be done by rhythm, rather than by tempo. For instance, eighth notes become quarter notes, quarter notes become half notes, and so on.

5) Diminution

Speed up the melody rhythmically. Diminution, the opposite of augmentation, usually cuts the note values in half.

